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ABSTRACT

This document presents a summary report of a survey of University of Pittsburgh alumni designed to learn how alumni feel about their Alumni Association and how they relate to the university or might be willing to in the future. Some of the major findings of the inquiry include: (1) Although only 6% of the sample consider themselves active in the Alumni Association, only very small minorities say that this is because they are not interested in its activities or because they disapprove of what is happening in the university; (2) Answers to many questions reveal considerable support for the university; (3) The alumni expressed very little negative feeling toward faculty, staff, or students; (4) Alumni strongly agree on the top two priorities of the college of maintaining a high quality undergraduate education and training graduate technical and professional personnel; and (5) Disagreements among alumni are focused on university-community relations and on new trends in policy and program areas. (HS)

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A SURVEY OF THE ALUMNI OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH: RELATIONSHIP TO ALUMNI ACTIVITY AND OPINIONS ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY

A Condensation of January, 1973 Report

HE 004 343

By Martha Baum, Ph.D. and Barbara B. Jameson, Ph.D.
and the Staff of the University-Urban Interface Program

For the Alumni Association of the University of Pittsburgh

April, 1973

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This report is dedicated to the memory of Alvin D. Copozzi, Chairman of the Survey Committee of the Alumni Association, who provided invaluable support for the realization of this survey.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written in the last decade about the changes in higher education. Attention has focused on student unrest, the physical growth of the universities, financial difficulties, and other crises producing problems. But, as pointed out in a report by the Carnegie Commission,* these crises often consume so much of the educator's time "that a longer view is neglected". The report continues

> Often neglected, too--at least until the next fund drive--is news of the whereabouts and progress of recent alumni. This is unfortunate since they, of all persons, are especially qualified by experience to contribute insight into the ways in which college failed or served them and perhaps how it may best serve the future.

It was in this spirit that the Alumni Association, encouraged by the Alumni Council and by alumni representatives to the University Board of Trustees, decided to sponsor a questionnaire survey of alumni opinions and expectations of the University. By this means, the collective judgments of Association members could be brought to the attention of those responsible for making University policy. In addition, the Alumni Association was interested in learning more about what its members thought about the Association and its services and activities.

Through discussion with staff at the University-Urban Interface Program,** plans were made for a cooperative effort between that research group and the Alumni Association. The research group offered the services of its professional staff to carry out an extensive and scientifically

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*Joe L. Spaeth and Andrew M. Greeley, Recent Alumni and Higher Education: A Survey of College Graduates, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1970.

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controlled survey in exchange for use of the data in connection with its study of the relationships between this large urban university and the community in which it resides.

In April of 1972, a final version of the questionnaire, developed with close cooperation between the research staff and the Survey Committee of the Alumni Association, was completed and mailed to a stratified random sample of alumni. Almost one-third of the sample (939) of 3,000 returned completed questionnaires, a very good return for a mailed survey, particularly one which was twelve pages in length. The sample was stratified to ensure adequate representation from Pitt's fifteen schools, and from the several geographic areas in which alumni reside. The returned sample matches very closely the actual distribution of alumni by school and area of residence and also by age and sex.

The report which follows is a condensation of a more exhaustive report presented to the Alumni Association in January, 1973.*

The authors of the report wish to express their appreciation to Patricia Heinz, David Fyock, and Bernard Koperek, of the Office of Development and Alumni Affairs, for their help in launching the survey, and also to Christina Jarema, Sandi McCoy, and Linda Wykoff of the University-Urban Interface Program for their assistance in preparing the data for the report.

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*Martha Baum and Barbara Jameson, A Survey of the Alumni of the University of Pittsburgh: Relationship to Alumni Activity and Opinions about the University, for the Alumni Association of the University of Pittsburgh, January, 1973.

Review of Survey Findings

One of the major purposes of this survey was to learn how alumni feel about their Alumni Association and how they relate to the University or might be willing to in the future.

The first question in this section is simply "In your opinion, what is an alumni association for?" It was hoped that the respondents would answer this with what first came to their minds rather than picking up ideas from subsequent questions. The responses were first categorized and then tabulated, counting each of the often many answers given by any one respondent. A very large number of respondents said that the Alumni Association "solicits money", even more people see the Association as a conveyor of information. This indicates that people do have expectations of the Association performing functions beyond getting financial support for the University. Table 1 lists the other categories into which the answers fell and the number of alumni who gave that response.

Table 1

Question: In your opinion, what is an alumni association for? (open-ended)

		N
1.	Information collector and transmitter	325
2.	Solicits money	289
3.	Promotes alumni interests and activities at the University	82
4.	Public relations for University	80
5.	Promotes solidarity and social ties; tours, parties etc.	78
6.	Helps University formulate policy	61
7.	Helps alumni perform certain services for the University	41
8.	Performs service for alumni; helps alumni	22

In addition, 145 of the responses made general comments as to the positive contribution of the Association, while 12 said the Association was

"useless" or made other negative remarks. Twenty-five people said they did not know what the Association is for.

Only six per cent of the alumni sampled considered themselves to be active members of the Alumni Association. As Table 2 shows, however, few gave as their reason for inactivity "lack of interest in Association activities", even fewer cited "disapproval of what was happening at the University", as a reason for their non-participation.

Table 2

Question: All alumni become automatically members of the Alumni Association upon leaving the university. However, many never really become active participants in the Association. Please circle ONE statement that best describes your relation to the Association.

	%
I am active in the Alumni Association	6.1
I am not active in the Association because I am not interested in its activities	11.2
I am not active in the Association because I disapprove of what is happening in the University itself	4.9
I am not active in the Association because I have other interests and activities which are more important to me	55.2
I am not active in the Association because: (Other)	21.1

A large majority of the respondents felt they were inactive simply because they had other interests that were more pressing. Answers to the question on relationship to the Association were cross-tabulated with some of the background information on the respondents. With respect to age, the youngest (under 30) of the five age groups used for cross-tabulation was found to be very much underrepresented in the active group. Geographically, people from the suburbs were underrepresented as compared with those living in Pittsburgh. Alumni from some of the University schools, such as Dentistry, Education, and the Humanities, were also less likely to be active in the Association.

Lack of active participation in the Alumni Association cannot be taken as total lack of interest in the University. On the contrary, a very high percentage of the sample reported that they are still engaging regularly in University-related activities. Table 3 shows that fewer than a third say they engage in none of the activities listed.

Table 3

Question: Which of the University of Pittsburgh-related activities do you do fairly regularly? Circle all appropriate numbers.

	% Yes Responses
Read University publications	55.6
See Pitt alumni friends	30.6
Attend athletic events	23.5
Talk with students, faculty, or staff members.	21.6
Attend professional organization meetings held at Pitt	13.8
Attend University educational/cultural events.	12.6
Help in fund-raising	9.7
Communicate with legislators	6.6
Attend alumni social events	5.5
None of the above	28.1

When the responses to this question were cross-tabulated by age, members of the under-30 group, least likely to be active in the Association, are the most likely to say that they attend University educational and cultural events and also the most likely to continue to see friends from Pitt and to talk regularly with students, faculty, and staff. The respondents on the whole seem positive in their attitudes toward Pitt and continue to keep "in touch" by various means. Indeed, answers to several other questions suggested that alumni would appreciate more activities. For example, slightly over two-thirds (67.3 per cent) of those sampled felt that: "One of the best things the Pitt Alumni Association could do is offer alumni more opportunities for non-credit, post-college study, e.g.,

seminars on campus, reading programs at home, and travel/study tours." About a quarter of the sample indicated that they would enjoy opportunities to work with students in counseling or advisory capacities, while almost a third said they would like more activities directly related to the school from which they received graduate degrees.

Good feelings about the University were manifested in other ways. Questions to the alumni sample about pride in being an alumnus and about the University's prospects for the future revealed a good deal of support and optimism. Asked whether they felt proud to tell their friends and acquaintances that they had attended Pitt, a majority (52.1 per cent) said that they were proud all of the time, and another third (30.5 per cent) answered that they were proud most of the time (as contrasted with some or none of the time). As for the University's future, respondents were asked to use a ten-point scale or "ladder" to rate how they thought the University stood or would stand at three points in time--past, present, and future. The table below shows the medians (the midpoints of all sample ratings) assigned by the respondents. It can be seen that those sampled see the University as being closer to its greatest hopes now than it was five years ago, and expects it to be even closer to this optimal position five years from now (7.3 per cent indicates a very positive median for a ten-point scale).

Table 4

Question: Looking at the ladder below, suppose the top of the ladder (10) represents your greatest hopes for the University of Pittsburgh, and the bottom (0) represents your worst fears. Fill in the number beside each of the following three questions with the number on the ladder which most represents your judgment.

	Medians
Where did the University of Pittsburgh stand five years ago?	5.7
Where would you put the University of Pittsburgh at the present time?	6.8
Where do you think the University of Pittsburgh will be on the ladder five years from now?	7.3

On a more general level, alumni were asked what they thought Pitt should have done for them as students. It was possible to compare their

Table 5

Question: Below are several kinds of things that might be important elements in the maturing process. Which of these things do you think the University of Pittsburgh should have given you?

I think Pitt (or my college) should have . . .

	Pitt Alumni % Yes	Natl Alumni % Yes
Developed my abilities to think and express myself	93 (1)	98 (1)
Helped me to learn to make my own decisions	83 (2)	81 (3)
Expanded my tolerance for people and ideas	81 (3)	90 (2)*
Given me a broad knowledge of the arts and sciences	75 (4)	90 (2)*
Helped me to formulate values and goals of my life	73 (5)	80 (4)
Prepared me to get ahead in the world	68 (6)*	70 (5)
Trained me for my present job	68 (6)*	65 (7)
Helped me to learn ways of helping people	65 (7)	60 (8)
Helped me to learn how to get along with others	64 (8)	67 (6)
Helped me to form valuable and lasting friendships	53 (9)	54 (9)
Helped me to prepare for marriage and family	30 (10)	39 (10)

*Duplication of numbers indicates tie results on two items within one of the samples.

responses with a national survey of college graduates carried out in 1968,* in which respondents were given the same eleven items to check for "yes" or "no". Perhaps the most interesting thing about the table above is that a majority, and frequently a large majority, in both samples think their colleges should have done most of these things for them, demonstrating that much more is asked of a college or university than academic knowledge.

Nevertheless, when asked to choose from a list of nine possible University goals, which included research, training programs in foreign countries, and programs to alleviate social problems, the alumni overwhemlingly chose a high-quality undergraduate education as the first priority and providing graduate and professional/technical training as the second. This concurred with the choices made by University trustees, faculty, administrators, and students in other recent Pitt surveys.**

Other questions about the University were more specific and had to do with attitudes toward University personnel and, particularly, policy. Many of these items simply asked the respondent to agree, disagree, or indicate "no opinion". Four items were used to obtain attitudes toward Pitt faculty, administrators and students. The statements used were all favorable, and it can be seen in the table below that few of the sample disagreed with any of the items. Many, however, indicated that they did not feel qualified to give an opinion about these groups.

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*Spaeth and Greeley, op. cit., p. 189.

**The results of this study can be found in a recently published report: Holbert N. Carroll, A Study of the Governance of the University of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh, 1972.

Table 6

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
On the whole, I feel the administration at Pitt is doing a fine job.	45.5	15.2	39.3
On the whole, Pitt faculty are well-qualified and responsible.	55.6	12.2	32.2
University of Pittsburgh students are not as wild as those shown on the news media.	46.6	7.8	45.6
On the whole, the University of Pittsburgh students seem to appreciate a college education.	49.5	6.8	43.7

Some of the questions on University policy may be reviewed rather briefly. Alumni respondents were in close agreement on some items. A very large majority of alumni (85.8 per cent) agreed that the University of Pittsburgh still needs private financial support in spite of funding from the state (another indication of support for the Institution). Most (69.1 per cent) also felt that the University should assume some responsibility for governing dormitory student hours and activities, and most (64.3 per cent) were against letting the private sector manage student housing. A clear majority (62.1 per cent) showed a preference for having students at the University represent "a mix from other places" rather than "concentrating on mainly educating local young people". The issue of tenure for faculty was not quite so clearcut. Although a great majority of those sampled (88.1 per cent) were against protecting "faculty members who fail to maintain their competence as teachers and scholars", only about half the sample (50.3 per cent) disagreed with a statement that faculty tenure was an indispensable element in the protection of academic freedom, while almost a third (31.5 per cent) agreed with this statement.

The sample was clearly split on two questions concerning relations between the University and the community. About half the sample felt

they were only fair or even poor. Similarly, the respondents were divided almost evenly as to whether the University had now gone far enough or should go even further in terms of accommodating community groups in connection with its building plans.

Finally, in the controversial area where the most pressures for policy changes in higher education are being felt, opinion was very much divided. A large majority (63.2 per cent) of the alumni were in favor of "increasing enrollment to give people who have been traditionally denied university training an opportunity for higher education". At the same time, however, a very high concern was expressed by the sample that academic standards might decline, even among those who favored increasing enrollment. Concern for academic standards declining was also highly related to four other items on the questionnaire which pertained to changing admissions policies and a possible strong "urban thrust" for the University. Cross-tabulations showed that those who worried about standards were far more likely than the rest of the sample to disagree with all of the four statements in the table below. Comparison with responses from a random sample of Pitt students* (included in the same table) shows that, while students are somewhat more favorable to "newer" policies and programs, the difference is distinctly relative, and both samples are quite divided. (See Table 7, page 12)

Some differences in responses were found in connection with age, region, and school of highest degree. Younger alumni tended to see students and faculty in a more favorable light than older alumni. On the other hand, they were less likely to agree that the administration was doing a fine job.

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*Survey conducted by the University-Urban Interface Program, 1970.

Table 7

	Alumni			Students		
	Agree	Disagree	No Opin	Agree	Disagree	NoOpin
There should be a special admissions policy for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., blacks and the poor).	29.7	58.4	12.0	44.1	47.1	8.8
Extra effort should be made to hire more minority faculty.	26.7	48.8	24.5	35.7	44.7	14.6
There is a need for more courses reflecting concern with urban problems.	49.9	19.2	30.9	60.8	20.4	18.8
The University should play a larger role in alleviating social ills in urban areas.	40.5	37.7	21.8	54.2	29.7	16.1

Younger alumni, most particularly the youngest category, are very much less in favor of University supervision of dormitory behavior, yet they are less willing than older alumni to let the private sector take over student housing. Older alumni were less likely to approve a policy of increasing enrollment and also more opposed to changes which would stress educating the disadvantaged and getting involved in urban problems. It would seem that younger alumni, more recently students, who have been more exposed to arguments for change, are somewhat more favorably disposed to this change. Regional differences occurred on what appeared to be a somewhat analagous basis. Those closer to the University, that is those living in the Pittsburgh area, are more supportive of students and less supportive of the administration, suggesting somewhat more sympathy for demands for change. Pittsburgh residents are also more likely to agree with items advocating a special admissions policy for the disadvantaged and for increasing the University's urban involvement; they also are more likely to approve of increasing enrollment. The contrast is clearest between the urban dwellers of Pittsburgh and those

residing in the suburbs or in the rest of the state. Out-of-state respondents were more likely to resemble Pittsburgh residents in the kinds of responses they made, quite possibly because they are also predominantly urban dwellers. Urban residents, then, particularly those in Pittsburgh, who are more directly exposed to contemporary urban problems are somewhat more in favor of making the kinds of policy and program changes suggested in the statements. It must be emphasized, however, that the differences in age and residence are only relative and that in none of the controversial areas was the sample or any category within it entirely in agreement about what should or should not be done.

Differences between alumni by school of highest degree were frequent and sometimes very strong, indicating the complexity of the University. The responses from the sample, when divided by school, clearly point out that a policy highly approved in one school can easily be very much opposed in another. Making one rule to fit all is a very delicate procedure. A good example is the difference between alumni from those schools whose professional concern it is to work with the disadvantaged and with urban problems and alumni from schools where professional involvement in these areas is very much less. The former are very much more in favor than the latter of increasing enrollment, having a special admissions policy for the disadvantaged and so on.

A few words may be added about how relationship to the Alumni Association is connected with some of the personnel and policy items. Those who are critical of the University are consistently the most opposed of all five groups (as identified in Table 1) to all of the suggested changes in University policy and program. Together with those who said they are not active in the Association because they are not interested in its activities,

they also had the fewest favorable attitudes toward students, faculty, or the administration. The active alumni are generally the most favorable of all toward both University personnel and policy and program change; however, those who have other interests or are not active for other reasons are not far behind.

Most of the alumni do depend on alumni publications (e.g., the Alumni Times) as their most important source of news about the University. High on the list, also, are such sources as the University Times and the Pitt News. Yet when asked about what the Alumni Association could do to provide better information, only a quarter of the sample (23.8 per cent) felt that the information presently supplied was adequate. The remainder asked for more frequent mailings of newsletters and other newspapers, an increase in information on University goals and policies, more focused reports on individual schools and departments, and more surveys, seminars and meetings.

Table 8 shows that the item chosen as of most interest in an alumni paper was information about the curriculum and about non-degree seminars.

A summary of the major findings from the survey follows.

Table 8

Question: The following is a list of the kinds of articles that might appear in an alumni newspaper. What would be your interest in reading the following items? Please rate all items by circling the number in the appropriate box.

	Very Interested(%)	Interested(%)	Not Interested(%)
Goals, policies of the University	32.6	48.8	18.7
University curriculum	28.6	50.4	21.0
Non-degree lectures, seminars, etc.	25.7	40.7	33.7
Alumni accomplishments	23.5	53.4	23.1
Degree courses for adults	21.8	38.6	39.6
University-community relations	20.4	49.1	30.4
Sports	20.4	42.0	37.6
In-depth faculty accomplishments	16.3	44.8	38.8
Alumni social functions, tours	16.0	45.8	38.2
Coming campus events	14.2	49.2	36.7
Faculty briefs	13.7	45.3	39.0
Administration news	13.6	53.7	32.7
Student news	12.0	50.4	37.6
Review of campus events	9.8	51.4	38.8
Class notes (weddings, babies, etc.)	7.0	29.4	63.5
Fund-raising	4.8	44.0	51.1
Alumni in uniform	4.7	28.0	67.3

Summary of Major Findings

The Alumni Survey was conducted to learn more about how Pitt alumni feel about their university and what the Alumni Association can do to facilitate the input of this important constituency into the decision-making process of the University. The Association also hoped to learn more about alumni needs in order to make the Association a more viable organization. The findings are summarized below under five major points.

(1) Although only six per cent of the sampled alumni consider themselves to be active in the Alumni Association, only very small minorities say that this is because they are not interested in its activities or because they disapprove of what is happening in the University. The largest number think that the Association should primarily act as a conveyor and transmitter.

While most think highly of the informative qualities of the newspapers they do receive through Association auspices, great interest was expressed in increasing the information flow. More information about University goals and policies was the area of greatest concern. (Tables 1 and 8)

(2) Answers to many questions reveal considerable support for the University. Alumni engage in many University-related activities. They feel proud to have attended Pitt and are optimistic about the future of the University. They also believe that the University still needs private financial support in spite of state backing. (Tables 3 and 4)

(3) The alumni expressed very little negative feeling toward faculty, staff, or students, but large percentages of the respondents had no opinion on University personnel. Many did question the need for tenure and a sizeable number of alumni favor supervision of student dormitories. (Table 6)

(4) Alumni respondents, like other alumni around the nation, are inclined to expect many things from their colleges and universities; however, the Pitt alumni (like other constituencies at this University) had no difficulties in strongly agreeing on two top priorities: maintaining a high quality undergraduate education and training graduate technical and professional personnel. (Table 5)

(5) Disagreements among alumni are focused on University-community relations and on new trends in policy and program areas. (Table 7)

The sample was completely divided both on how good the relations between the University and the community were and on whether or not the University had gone far enough or should go further in accommodating community groups. More directly related were items about increasing enrollment to include those traditionally denied access to higher education and about special programs for the disadvantaged and increasing the "urban

thrust" of the University. Although a sizeable majority of Pitt alumni favor increasing enrollment, they are nevertheless very much afraid of possible falling academic standards. This latter concern is strongly linked to a lack of support for programs in the above areas.

It would seem that the Alumni Association could perform a service to its members, to the University, and to itself by providing the administration with information about alumni focal concerns. University administrators, in turn, might be willing to provide fuller explanations of present policies and trends (and their potential effects) which could be transmitted to the alumni.